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### This story first appeared in:

Daily Press and Argus

Sunday, November 23, 2003

### Living

## Day for adoption celebrates families

Daily Press & Argus

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For the first time in Michigan, final adoptions hearings will be open to the public Saturday.

Congress and President Bush designated Nov. 22 as National Adoption Day. In the state of Michigan, Adoption Day is set for Nov. 25 and children will be officially adopted at Livingston County Court to celebrate.

"It's a celebration of family," said Brenda Haslett, a local foster care and adoption advocate. "Family doesn't have to be biological."

The public is invited to watch the final hearings in the adoptions of nine children at the family division of Livingston County 44th Circuit Court from 2-5 p.m. Tuesday. Such hearings, which conclude the adoption process, are usually closed.

"In most cases, people are not happy to come to court," said Judge Susan L. Reck, Chief Judge of 44th Circuit Court. "Adoptions are an exception." She said a legal adoption is a joyous occasion for the families and for the court, Family Independence Agency office and adoption agencies.

Usually adoption hearings are closed to the public. The open adoption hearings are "unprecedented," said Donna Cherba, adoption supervisor at Livingston County 44th Circuit Court.

Brenda Haslett and her husband are not only setting up a reception after the hearings; they will be the first adopting parents to stand before Judge Reck. They will

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finalize their adoption of Leighla, a toddler who's lived with them in their Fowlerville home as a foster child since she was three weeks old.

Among the other children who will be adopted in Livingston County Nov. 25 are three siblings who will remain in the same home, said Haslett.

Cherba said of the 96 applications for adoption that went through 44th Circuit Court in 2002, 25 were of wards of the state. Thousands of these children, who have been removed from their natural parents because of abuse or neglect, need families.

"Victim is really a strong term, but they are," she said. "They would like to be with their parents, but their parents don't know how to be parents." Older children, especially, need homes.

Usually, adoption hearings are closed to the public, but Adoption Day will be an exception to give the public a view of what adopting a child looks like. Parents who have completed adoptions and licensing agents will also be on hand to answer questions.

Haslett, who said foster parenting and adoption are her passion, said there is a need for adoption in this area.

"We're doing everything we can think of to do," she said. "We have numerous kids who are ready to be adopted."

According to a study commissioned by the Michigan Supreme Court and Family Independence Agency, 12,673 children were temporary wards of the court as a result of child protective proceedings as of July 31. At the same time, 19,490 children were in foster care.

At the end of fiscal year 2002, Michigan had 4,615 permanent state wards available for adoptions; 2,833 adoptions were finalized in fiscal year 2002.

Info box:

¥Adoption hearings at Livingston County Court will be open to the public from 2-5 p.m. Nov. 25. Adoptive parents and agencies will be on hand to answer questions.

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